



Not To Disclose In Education

The decision to disclose a disability in the education sector is a personal choice for people with disabilities. Disclosure is an individual decision, depending on the circumstances, the context and how comfortable the person feels about it.

When, how and if disclosure is to occur is often affected by such factors as:

- the type of disability
- the type of educational course being undertaken
- whether the disability is apparent or not and how this might affect academics' judgment of the person's ability to undertake their chosen course
- the need for education related adjustments or supports while studying
- the attitudes of academic and other staff and students, towards people with a disability

The decision to disclose or not is often not a final decision but one that can be re-evaluated over time, based on the student's circumstances. It is important that the factors that determine whether disclosure occurs or not be explored before a decision is made. In determining whether disclosure should occur or not students need to:

- identify possible consequences of disclosing their disability
- investigate their legislative rights and responsibilities
- consider the experiences of other students and staff with disabilities
- explore the availability of disability support services and networks at the education institution.

Many people with disabilities have weighed up these factors and made the personal decision that disclosure of disability should not occur whilst pursuing educational options or whilst studying.

Mark has returned to further education to upgrade his qualification. When Mark last attended university he required support and a range of education related adjustments to assist him with his course, which he successfully completed. This time, however, Mark is living independently with his partner and is working part-time. He has been successfully managing his disability related needs and has developed many strategies for achieving his goals.

Reasons Against Disclosure

Many people with disabilities choose not to disclose the nature or impact of their disability because of:

Discrimination:

- fear of disclosing a disability believing it may result in discrimination, or opportunities being denied, such as opportunities to participate in all aspects of a course
- fear of being denied certain entitlements
- past experiences of discrimination may influence future choices about disclosure
- fear that the disability will become the central focus and not the academic capacity of the person
- fear that a student with a disability will be treated differently to other students

Attitudes:

- fear that their disability may provoke curiosity or unnecessary concern in others.
- concern that others may have preset or unrealistic attitudes about students with a disability
- concern that a student with a disability may be treated differently by teachers, other staff or students
- concern that disability issues are not well understood by others

- fear of being marginalised, particularly with certain disabilities that are steeped in stereotyped attitudes, such as mental illness.

Performance:

- students often do not need to disclose their disability. Some students may have a disability that does not impact on their capacity to undertake study at university or TAFE and feel confident that they will not require any additional supports or education related adjustments during their studies.
- many students have developed strategies for managing their disability and would not benefit from disclosing their disability.

Other:

- the disability does not impact on their study
- an expectation that equity and access are in place thus eliminating the need to seek education related adjustments
- the education institution has implemented technology structures, universal/inclusive design and flexible learning practices which have enhanced the education experience without the need for adaptation or specialised design for all people, including people with disabilities. Disclosure of disability therefore may not be required due to the inclusive practices embedded in the education institution.

Students Responsibilities if Not Disclosing a Disability

Non disclosure may result in the following:

- inability to negotiate education related adjustments at University or TAFE
- if there is a crisis related to the person's disability such as deterioration in an existing disability or medical condition, it may be difficult to implement education related adjustments quickly
- a teacher may interpret the impact of the disability as poor work performance
- a student may become guarded about informal personal discussions with other students for fear of disclosing their disability
- inability of the person with a disability to use their position and experiences to assist in raising the awareness and support of students with disabilities.

Staff Responsibilities If a Student Does Not Disclose a Disability

Where a student has not disclosed a disability, teaching and other staff are **not** responsible for providing educational education related adjustments. It is not the responsibility of staff to justify why no education related adjustments were provided during the period when the student had not disclosed their disability.